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Codes of Ethics for the Teaching Profession

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THE professions exist for the purpose of rendering service to humanity. The service to be rendered by the teaching profession is *to assist in preparing human beings in their younger periods of life so that they may be equipped mentally, morally and physically to live in the most serviceable manner possible during the whole of life.* The rendering of this type of service is not to be done exclusively by the teaching profession. The home is, or should be, the most efficient co-partner in rendering this service. The church should be a close second to the school and the home. Various social organizations and activities also assist in this service.

The teaching profession consists of a group of men and women trained and organized for the rendering of that special service to humanity, and no man or woman is worthy of membership in this profession unless he is thoroughly imbued with a determination to render the service for which the profession exists, even if, at times, it means personal sacrifice. From the ethical point of view, the fundamental qualities of the worthiness of men or women to be in the teaching profession are an unadulterated feeling of loyalty to the purpose of the profession and a thorough determination to render the service required. This test should apply to all alike, even the very beginner in the service who may anticipate that her tenure may be short. The profession should strongly object to the entrance of anyone who is deliberately using it merely as a stepping-stone to some other profession or occupation, unless that occupation be motherhood. Moreover, when the obli-

gations of motherhood have been satisfied, the mother who was previously trained as a teacher, should be welcomed into active service in the profession. She has probably been much improved in her qualifications as a teacher by her experience as a mother. Her services are needed in the profession. Why should she wait until she becomes a widow before returning to active service?

ENTRANCE STANDARDS

The mode of entrance into the teaching profession is not nearly as uniform as the mode of entrance at present into the medical profession, which in that regard has the most nearly uniform standards of all the professions. On this point, however, the teaching profession will compare very favorably with the other professions with the possible exception of law. The vast majority of the members of the teaching profession, made up of those in the several public school systems, enter the profession by meeting definite requirements laid down by the several states. Unfortunately it is still true that the minimum requirement for entrance is much too low, and one of the first duties of the profession is to take steps to increase the entrance standards. It is encouraging to note that the last few years have seen much improvement in this regard; notwithstanding the great increase in the demand for teachers.

One of the most hopeful signs in the profession is the increased emphasis upon professional training. The tendency, as far as public school service is concerned, is to make entrance into

the profession conditional upon the successful completion of a course of professional training in some professional school. There is even some indication that professional training is being considered as of value when selections are being made for new instructors in some of our colleges and universities.

The lack of uniformity in the modes of entering the profession have made it difficult to instill into the prospective teacher ideals of professional ethics. In fact in hundreds of cases in the past no sense of professional obligation was existent.

ORGANIZATIONS

When it comes to organizations made up of members of the profession we find them very numerous. We have organizations by states, by counties and by local districts; we have organizations on the basis of the subjects taught; we have organizations on the basis of the kind of school or college in which the members teach; for example, organizations of teachers in private preparatory schools, or even of teachers in schools of a given religious denomination. We have organizations made up of teachers in urban universities, for instance. Every few months we learn of a new organization whose members consist of teachers.

That organization of the teaching profession which without doubt should be placed first in our country is the National Educational Association, and it seems to me that that is the organization which will inevitably be the most influential in bringing the profession up to the ideal standards of a profession; but doubtless many other associations will play an important part. In the college and university portion of the profession, the American Association of University Professors seems to bid fair to do much toward bringing its

members up to ideal professional standards.

EXISTING CODES

At least twelve codes of ethics for teachers have been formulated. There may be others which have not come to my notice. Some of these have been prepared by local clubs; for example, the code prepared by the Barnard Club in Providence, Rhode Island. Others have been prepared by teacher's associations which cover certain definite geographical districts, not following state or local municipal lines; for example, the code prepared by the Monongahela Round Table in the northern part of West Virginia. Some have been prepared by students in graduate university courses in education, such as the one prepared at the University of Utah. Several have been prepared by committees of state associations for teachers and afterwards approved by those associations. The state associations in the following states have approved codes: California, Michigan, Mississippi, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York and Oregon. Of these state codes, that prepared by Michigan is the most recent. The one by Pennsylvania is next. The Michigan Code is avowedly in a very tentative form.

The Pennsylvania Code was approved by the State Education Association in December, 1920. Over three years was spent by the committee in preparing it. In the process of preparation, the committee studied all of the other available codes for the profession, as well as the codes of other professions, including medicine, law, architecture and engineering. The Pennsylvania Code is given in full in the appendix of this volume.¹ The code of ethics

¹ See "A Code of Ethics for the Teaching Profession Adopted by the Pennsylvania State Education Association," page 281.

adopted by the State Association of Pennsylvania is printed as typical of those adopted by other states. A code of ethics was adopted by the New Jersey State Teachers' Association in December, 1914. Other codes have been adopted as indicated on page 122, but the Pennsylvania code was chosen for printing in full because it is both recent in adoption and fairly complete in details. The Bureau of Education, Washington, D. C., has published a list of codes for teachers, with references to educational periodicals.

There naturally arises the question as to the relation of the particular code of ethics for a profession to ethical principles in general. That question is probably best answered by saying that a code of ethics for a profession is merely an application of the general principles of ethics to the special obligations, rights and privileges of the profession, having always in mind the special service for which the profession exists. In view of the special relationship between the teaching profession and the youth of our country, it is of the highest importance that *each member of the profession shall have achieved in himself a character worthy of daily presentation to those being taught.*

FIRST PRINCIPLE OF THE TEACHER'S CODE

The highest obligation of every member of the profession is due to those who are being taught, either by him directly or by the school system in which he holds a place. This is the fundamental ethical principle of the profession. Putting it negatively, this principle states that the teacher's highest obligation is not to the board of school directors, or to the superintendent of the school, or to the principal, or to himself, or to the parents of his pupils. Every disputed or doubtful point in connection with any other

ethical principle should be settled by determining which mode of settlement best meets the obligation asserted in this first principle. This principle should be considered equally applicable to teachers in the colleges and universities.

COMPENSATION

In every profession some of the most troublesome ethical problems arise in connection with the subject of compensation and the related subject of appointments, promotions and contracts. It is unquestionably the urgent duty of the profession to demand adequate compensation, since only when there is adequate compensation can the profession meet its obligation to those being taught. Individuals may, it is true, render the highest type of service with inadequate compensation, but in order that the profession as a whole may render a high type of service, men and women of high ability must be attracted to it. Moreover, when in the profession, they must be financially able to do the various things necessary for efficient service. For example, they must be able to purchase books and periodicals, to travel and, especially, to attend meetings of the various societies in the profession. Furthermore, they must be able to live in their respective communities in such a way as to command respect and recognition by the community. The Michigan Code says, "It is unprofessional for a teacher to sign a yearly contract to teach for a wage that is not sufficient to cover living expenses for twelve months."

PROMOTIONS AND CONTRACTS

Many a teacher, principal or superintendent is tempted to use an unethical procedure when the question of an appointment or promotion is involved, because then his personal

comfort and inconvenience are most prominently before him. Personal comfort is a secondary matter in the mind of any real altruist. This remark applies with equal if not greater force to the superintendent who is tempted to stand in the way of a desired advancement so as to avoid the inconveniences incident to the replacement of teachers. It is a short-sighted policy to argue that the best interests of the children will be served by preserving the *status quo*.

Another point of temptation arises when the acceptance of an opportunity for advancement involves the breaking of a contract. No teacher, or anyone else, should ever violate a contract. Unless the consent of the employing body is obtained, thereby releasing the obligation, the contract should be fulfilled. The principle just stated should suggest to the wise teacher that care should be exercised as to the terms in a contract before the contract is signed. In particular, he should see that the contract contains a reasonable provision for its termination upon giving proper notice.

CRITICISM OF ASSOCIATES

Under the head of criticisms of associates, the teaching profession might well take note of the corresponding principle in the code of the medical profession. In the medical code we find the following: "When a physician does succeed another physician in charge of a case, he should not make comment on, or insinuations regarding, the practice of the one who preceded him." In the medical profession, the situation where one physician succeeds another in charge of a case is the unusual situation, whereas, in the teaching profession, it is the regular procedure. The only way in which a teacher with a class above the first grade can obtain

new pupils is by receiving the pupils previously taught by someone else. The practice of condemning the previous teachers of one's pupils is very common. It is probable that most of the deficiencies in the pupils are due to the great individual innate differences found in any considerable group of human beings, and that the differences which a teacher finds in a new group of students are almost certainly not due to any failure on the part of the preceding teacher.

Teachers who are aroused by the presence of deficient pupils in their classes seem to forget that much more skill is necessary to teach such pupils successfully than to teach the ordinary pupils. How much better it would be to recognize the presence of deficient pupils as a challenge to one's teaching ability. Might not this attitude save many a freshman in college? This does not imply that there should be in the same classroom for instruction purposes, a group varying widely in ability to take up the work in hand. Whenever pupils are classified on the basis of ability, the real teacher will feel it a compliment to be asked to take the weaker section. The demand upon teaching ability will be greater.

PRINCIPLES PECULIAR TO THE PENNSYLVANIA CODE

The Pennsylvania Code contains two sets of principles covering problems apparently untouched by the other codes which the writer has seen. I refer to the paragraph concerning democracy in the development of school plans, and the paragraph referring to the ethical factors entering into the supervision of classroom work.

The question as to the extent of the participation of teachers in the development and execution of school plans and policies is a live one. In this connection, it should be remem-

bered that neither the teacher nor the superintendent has any professional rights except those which grow out of the obligations of the profession to those being taught. The positive ethical principle here is that the superintendent, principals and teachers should collaborate and coöperate so as to make the schools as efficient for the good of the child as possible. This carries with it the right of teachers, even by collective action, to demand the privilege of such collaboration and coöperation, if it is not voluntarily granted. Such a democratic process of determining school policies will often lead to conclusions which are not considered wise by some members of the school system. In such cases, however, the obligation rests strongly upon all in the school system to support the school's policies so long as they continue to hold their positions. That is, when a policy is finally determined it should be loyally supported by all. This principle of democratic coöperation and collaboration should also be applied to instruction in our colleges and universities.

SUPERVISORY OFFICERS AND TEACHERS

In considering the relations between supervisory officers and teachers, it must be kept in mind that the first function of the supervisory officer, whether the superintendent or someone under him, is to help the teachers to become more successful teachers. The determination of the best methods of supervision is very important to every person in the school system. Is this not a problem upon which the teachers have a right to collaborate, remembering that the purpose of supervision is helpfulness? Cannot a plan be devised and operated whereby kindly constructive criticisms of the superintendent, supervisors and princi-

pals might be formulated by the supervised group? There need not be anything in such a procedure to hurt either the dignity or usefulness of the superintendent, supervisor or principal. The superintendent is not an autocrat, but merely one member of the profession who for the time being is given particular duties and responsibilities. Why should not the collective wisdom of the people in the school system be used to help him meet those special duties and responsibilities?

RELATION TO PUBLISHERS AND SUPPLY HOUSES

There is one other type of situation which leads to difficult ethical problems; namely, the relation of superintendents, principals and teachers to publishers and supply houses. The question arises in connection with superintendents or other members of the profession who have textbooks on the market or who have teaching devices of one kind or another for sale through supply houses. The statement of the Pennsylvania Code on this subject is as follows:

No member of the profession should act as an agent, or receive a commission or royalty or anything else of value, for any books or supplies in the selection of which he exercises official decision.

This is a rather moderate statement and may not go far enough. Some students of this question would impose much narrower restraints. In at least one state every member of any of the school systems of the whole state is forbidden by law to accept royalties from textbooks used anywhere in that state. Of course, it is very important that there should be a sufficient incentive to induce the best schoolmen to write the best possible textbooks and evidently such drastic legislation would greatly re-

duce one important incentive. However, the writer of a textbook in any particular field is probably not an unbiased judge in passing upon the relative merits of the textbooks in that field, and it seems that merely the waiving of the royalty, as required in the Pennsylvania Code, does not go quite far enough. Would it not be wise for him to refer the decision to someone who would undoubtedly be recognized as an unbiased judge, even though he may himself feel entirely unbiased in the matter and may have waived all rights to royalty? The full confidence of others in his integrity is worth much.

COMMISSION ON PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

The Pennsylvania Code, as far as the writer is aware, is the only one which carries with it the establishment of a permanent commission on professional ethics. Such a commission is now in existence in the state of Pennsylvania and is functioning. The duty of this commission is to study the various problems of professional ethics arising from time to time, to give the inquiring members of the profession its interpretation of the meaning of the various principles in the code, to arrange for investigations rendered advisable in connection with ethical problems, and to recommend amendments and additions to the code. If similar commissions could be estab-

lished in other states, and if there could be established a national commission to which appeals from the state commissions might be made, a national code of ethics, with an accompanying body of decisions and interpretations would gradually be established. The National Educational Association would seem to be the proper organization to take the first steps in this direction. Probably no one thing would go farther toward the securing of proper recognition of the teaching profession than the approval by the National Educational Association of a national code of ethics and the establishment under the auspices of that association of a national commission on professional ethics.

Of course, the mere formulation of codes of ethics will not accomplish much unless there is in some way implanted in every new teacher a sense of individual responsibility for maintaining good professional standards. This is the task of state departments of education, of superintendents of schools, and especially of the faculties of teacher's training schools. There is need of a short course, possibly two or three weeks in length, in every teachers' training school, bringing individually to each student the ethical obligations about to be assumed when the student enters the teaching profession, and warning against the special temptations to unethical conduct that so frequently present themselves.